A former prison officer raped coworkers inside the facility and at their homes, and now 4 women are suing

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(MLive file photo)File Photo

MARQUETTE, MI – Four women who worked inside Marquette Branch Prison with a former correction officer recently convicted on multiple sexual assault charges are suing the prison system for failing to protect them.

A lawsuit was filed on July 28 in U.S. District Court Western District of Michigan by the four women, all listed as Jane Doe to protect their identities, against the Michigan Department of Corrections following the conviction of former Corrections Officer Gerald Burton.

The lawsuit claims MDOC did not follow its own policies regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault, it created a hostile work environment for the women, and it retaliated against them after reporting the abuse.

“Due to the ongoing litigation, MDOC will not be providing comment on the federal lawsuit at this time,” Michigan Department of Corrections Public Information Officer Jenni Riehle said.

Burton, 35, was found guilty in Marquette County Circuit Court in May on five Counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and four counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct.

He is still awaiting sentencing scheduled for Aug. 24, court records show.

The women – two nurses, a pharmacy assistant, and a veteran correctional officer – reported being sexually harassed by Burton and, for some of them, sexually assaulted by him within the prison located in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, according to the lawsuit.

One nurse, identified in the lawsuit as Jane Doe K, reported Burton was flirtatious and would not take “no” for an answer, the lawsuit states.

K said that, starting in 2020, Burton would seek her out when she was working alone in the nurse station where he would harass and sexually assault her when out of camera view, the lawsuit states.

The lawsuit claims Burton raped K twice inside the prison and once at her home after he

found out where she lived.

K did not report the incidents out of fear of losing her job. Instead, she went out of her way to avoid him by switching shifts, the lawsuit states.

K eventually reported the incidents after she discovered several other women working inside the prison had also been assaulted by Burton, the lawsuit states.

A pharmacy assistant, identified in the lawsuit as Jane Doe N, said Burton was inappropriately playful with her, stating he would regularly tug on her pants and, on at least one occasion, slapped her buttocks at work, the lawsuit claims.

She did not report the incidents until discovering other women shared her experience while working with Burton.

Another nurse, identified as Jane Doe A, observed Burton being “extra friendly” with women and had heard that he had groped another woman, according to the lawsuit.

Frequently, when she walked up the stairs during med pass, he would reach through the rails and jokingly grab at her ankles, the lawsuit states.

He once grabbed her buttocks while she was dispensing medication to prisoners. On another occasion he picked A up from behind to “show her how strong he was,” according to the lawsuit.

A veteran correctional officer, identified in the lawsuit as Jane Doe B, said Burton was initially playful with her on the job until being raped by him in her home in 2021, the lawsuit states.

Burton left B alone for about a year after the assault, the lawsuit states.

In 2022, B became friends with K. Shortly after the friendship started, K told B Burton was “real grabby” sparking B to tell K about the sexual assault and that she should be careful around Burton, the lawsuit states.

Burton started harassing B again after her divorce. B did her best to avoid him, but he would touch her whenever an opportunity presented itself, according to the lawsuit.

In 2024, B was assigned to light duty for medical recovery and was working in stations without camera coverage.

During this time, Burton’s aggression increased and he sexually harassed and assaulted her whenever he had the opportunity, the lawsuit states.

She was afraid to report him due to the “code of silence” that applied to female corrections

officers at the facility. She felt her career would be over if she reported it, according to the lawsuit.

Later in the year, Burton assaulted her in the prison sallyport. A month later she suffered a cardiac event at age 39, the lawsuit states.

On Oct. 3, 2024, K, N and A reported Burton's misconduct to the prison administration.

The case was referred to the Michigan State Police. Burton was not placed on administrative leave when the internal investigation commenced, the lawsuit states.

None of the women felt safe at work any longer.

"Because Burton continued to work and was outspoken about his alleged innocence, Plaintiffs' work environment became even more hostile," the lawsuit states.

Burton resigned shortly after the investigation started. The internal investigation ended without any action taken due to his resignation, the lawsuit states.